THE RAGTIME SOCIETY

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF CLASSIC RAGTIME

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Our first year is behind us. They say that if an enterprise can survive the first year, it will make it. I guess this means our enterprise to promote Classic Ragtime will continue to flourish.

Our renewals have come in from all over the world. Most of you have renewed. Some of you have not. To those of you who, for good reasons of your own, have chosen not to stay with us, we say goodbye, and thank you for supporting us in our first shaky year. Your interest in Ragtime helped make this Newsletter possible. If there is an "X" in the box at the end of this paragraph, it means that you will not receive any Newsletters after this one. If you intend to renew, but just haven't got around to it - it is now or never.

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This issue contains the second page of the article entitled, "Ragtime - An Excavation" by Charles Wilford. This issue also contains my long promised list of the tunes of Joseph F. Lamb. We know you will all be interested in the 24 unpublished Rags of Joe's. We can give you no information at this time, but hope in the future to be able to tell you more about these Rags.

PERFORMERS

There are no changes we can report this issue. Our correspondents have not brought us up to date, so any of you who are travelling will have to rely on the information that we have previously published.

PUBLICATIONS

This issue, Jim Kinnear reviews one book and two music folios:

"History of Popular Music", Barnes & Noble. $1.50. For those of you who have read "They All Played Ragtime" and would like to do a little further reading, we would suggest the above paperback. As its name suggests, it is a history, beginning with the psalm-singing early colonists, and brings one up to progressive jazz and rock 'n' roll. (This is music?)

There is a chapter on ragtime and the blues, however, and since these are both in the same chapter, they must have been synonymous in the author's mind. Joplin is mentioned in the 5-page ragtime section, but the best part of the 5-page section is devoted to Kerry Mills, Ben Harney, Felix Arndt, Zez Confrey, Irving Berlin and Lewis F. Muir, who is perhaps best remembered for his 1911 parody "When Ragtime Rosy Ragged The Rosary". There is much loud praise of "Alexander's Ragtime Band", and the author mentions that this song sold a million copies of sheet music. (So did "Maple Leaf Rag" a decade earlier and ever since).

The book, which runs 190 pages of material plus a bibliography, will make interesting, if possibly biased, reading for anyone interested in the early decades of the 20th. Century, especially where the early day songs are concerned. Written by David Ewen.

"The Ragtime Book", by John W. Schaum. For the young student.

This excellent little folio of ragtime is one of a series of 15 books on various musical topics from ballet to boogie. It was brought to our attention by Harry Tuck of Hanford, California. He advised that we have a look at it because he felt that it would fill a gap. We agree with him for this reason, and for the following: it contains 13 rags and cake-walks, but with a difference. They have been simplified and shortened, until they are somewhere about the level of Grade 1 or 2. The time has been altered to 4/4 in all cases, and the key has been changed to G, C, or F. Amongst others, it contains "Maple Leaf", "Weeping Willow" and "Hilarity" Rags, "Banjo Twang", "Smoky Mokes" and "Hello Ma Baby". Published by Belwin, Rockville Centre, L.I., N.Y., or order from the Ragtime Society, $1.25 ppd.

"Ragtime Piano Solos" and how to play them, by Billy Taylor. This folio contains a 2-page history on ragtime, a 2-page section on how to play ragtime piano, and 4 rags. All, apparently, by Billy Taylor. Order from Chas. H. Hansen Music Corporation, 119 West 57th. Street, New York 19, N.Y. The Society does not stock this item, as we do not think many of you will be interested in it.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK:

For the first time since the inception of the Ragtime Society one year ago, I am glad to report that we now have no back-orders of material ... with the exception of a few orders of "Sedalia Rag" which, unfortunately, we have been unable to print as yet. The large mass of orders reported last month for "Mississippi Rag" and "Swipesy Cake Walk" were entirely cleaned up about two weeks when we received this music back from the printers. This left only a few orders for the Bob Darch record, which in Canada is pressed by the same company which was busy making "The First Family", and desperately trying to catch up with demand. Consequently, all other material rapidly became out of stock, and we were unable to obtain the Darch record until a few days ago. Happily these have been mailed out also.

Perhaps this is a good omen. Let us hope so. Further in line with our new policy to speed up service to you, as announced in last month's Bulletin, we are very pleased to announce that this month's music

selections have been received back from the printer, and are now IN STOCK ready for mailing out. These are "Kansas City Rag", James Scott, and "The Smiler" (A Joplin Rag), Percy Wenrich.

Next month's music selections have gone to the printer and will be announced in the February Bulletin. No more waiting. We would like to thank Bill Mitchell for having made this month's selections available to us. This is a way in which many of you might assist us to make available to the Society in general, music which you might otherwise be unable to obtain. What Bill did, was to mail us several of his rare rags (which we had selected from his list previously sent us) which we had processed and returned to him. What we require from you, is the list of rags you own which you would be willing to loan us for about two weeks.

Many of you are making suggestions as to what we should print in the future, and we appreciate this very much. Most of our latest selections have been because of suggestions on your part, and we hope you will continue to let us know what you want. It would appear however, that most of you are not aware of copyright requirements, so perhaps a word or two here would be appropriate regarding copyrights.

As a general rule, (though not necessarily in Canada) copyrights were renewed, and most pieces of music will run for a total of 56 years. After this period the music becomes public domain material, and can be reprinted by anyone without prior permission. Some pieces of music were not re-copyrighted after the first 28 year period, and such a copyright then expired. This information can be obtained through much paperwork and at some cost. We have made no attempts to find this information, for the simple reason that there are just so many hours in one day, but it can be found. If any of you already have this information and would like to pass it along to us, it would help our work no end and be much appreciated. Suffice it to say that we have kept to the 56 year rule.

Many of you have requested rags which for the above reasons we cannot print. High on your list of requests are Artie Matthews "Pastime Rags", copyrighted 1913 through 1920. As time goes on, perhaps we will be able to start on this phase of the Society work, but at the moment we just do not feel we are in a position to undertake it. Bear with us.

of hack composers. Concerning Botsford I know nothing, but Lodge's compositions include also *Black Diamond Rag* (1912), *Baltimore Blues* (1917), *Hifalutin' Rag* (1918), and a large wad of assorted waltzes, ballads and 6/8s.

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The two first real rags I saw were reprinted in the October and November 1943 issues of the American "Record Changer". They were *Cotton Bolls* by Chas. Hunter (Composer of *Tickled to Death*), and *Weeping Willow* by Scott Joplin, both dating from the first years of this century. *Weeping Willow* is fine and typical Joplin, with a Chopinesque second strain, and the bass in the final strain actually becoming an interesting counter-point to the melody. *Cotton Bolls* is sweeter, with some very attractive themes, and is still one of my favourite rags. Both numbers were exciting examples of a type of music new to me, and I started to look for more. (The "Changer" has never printed any more, though I hopefully look through every issue I come across.)

The publishers had failed to provide anything worth while, and the next place to be tried was obviously the British Museum, the research worker's favourite playground. But the Museum does not index popular music; it merely wraps it up in bundles of convenient size, and tries to forget it. Whether anything can be found is more or less a matter of chance.

I dropped the words Scott Joplin in the slot; the machine shied at the unusual demand, laboured, and finally brought forth a triumphant pile of some sixteen rags! All clean and shiny originals, with brightly-coloured period covers, and evidently untouched by the hand of man for forty years. I had before me now enough ragtime to last anyone a long time, and they were all numbers I hadn't heard of before. *Weeping Willow* wasn't there; not even the famous *Maple Leaf*, though I found three evident attempts at a follow-up in *Fig Leaf Rag, Palm Leaf Rag,* and *Rose Leaf Rag.* These Joplin rags were a wonderful assortment, and one must suppose a cross-section of the very best ragtime.

The trouble with the Museum though is that you can't take the rags away to try them over; and still less can you take a piano into the Reading Room.* Making copies of copyright music is illegal, in addition to being very hard work, so almost all one can do is admire the originals and make furtive notes. However, this was sufficient to make possible a fairly detailed examination of the main structural qualities of ragtime.

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The distinctive feature of ragtime is of course the persistent syncopation of the melodic line. It was the first syncopated music; rhythms that are now jazz commonplaces first made their bow to a wondering world as ragtime, and the physical urge they added to the music had precisely the same appeal then that the swing bands have to the youth of to-day. These rhythms presumably mark the influence of the negro, but there is remarkably little negroid feeling in the rags, even though many of the early composers were negroes.

The syncopations in ragtime are always stiff and square-cut, and must be so performed with exactness by the pianist. The easyflowing rhythms that were brought to jazz by the Blues and the general vocalisation of instrumental style are lacking; in other words, there are no triplets.

Against the ragged right-hand syncopations, the pianist's left hand marks a regular four beats in each bar. (Although usually notated in 2/4 time, the off-beats are also sharply accented). The form of a rag is extremely strict. Each 'strain' or section of the composition (corresponding to the jazz 'chorus') is always 16 bars in length; a rag consists of three or four distinct strains, whose themes may be inter-related, but are often independent and contrasting. In performance each strain is played straight through, usually with a repeat, and in addition one or more strains may be repeated again later in the composition; thus the first strain is often used to end the piece.

One strain is invariably introduced with a change of key, and this, by a queer survival, is termed the Trio. There is usually a four-bar introduction (which has survived into much early jazz), but never a coda. It is a tradition of rags that they end abruptly in tempo with a short cut-off chord.

The form of a rag, in short, is basically that of a military march, from which it is obviously developed.

The harmonic basis of a rag is also the straightforward tonic-dominant structure of a simple song or march, with one important and very evident peculiarity: a very great use of diminished chords. Scott Joplin in particular made a speciality of this. Ragtime also was composed in a minor key much more commonly than

SHEET MUSIC

Boy, is it nice to be current with all music orders. The sheet music that we have been printing has been fun, but very time consuming. As we stated last Newsletter, our new policy will now be in effect. To restate this policy - we will now print the music before we announce it. We can, therefore, make immediate shipments to those of you who want our offerings.

This month we have printed two rags at the usual price of $1.00 each: "The Smiler", by Percy Wenrich, and "Kansas City Rag", by James Scott. Both of these rags have the cover as well as the music. We will not list our stocks of previous Society-issued music this issue. Most of you have seen the list in previous Newsletters. For those new members, we will again reproduce the list next issue. We have not published a list for some time of the good commercial sheet music that we have been able to find. Here it is, up-to-date, for those of you who have asked for it.

EUPHONIC SOUNDS	Scott Joplin	80¢
PINEAPPLE RAG	" "	80¢
WEEPING WILLOW	" "	80¢
PARAGON RAG	" "	80¢
COUNTRY CLUB	" "	80¢
SEARCH LIGHT RAG	" "	80¢
SCOTT JOPLIN'S NEW RAG	" "	80¢
THE FAVOURITE	" "	50¢
TEMPTATION RAG	Henry Lodge	80¢
DILL PICKLES RAG	Charles L. Johnson	80¢
CUM-BAC RAG	Charles L. Johnson	80¢
AT A GEORGIA CAMP MEETING	Kerry Mills	80¢
PICKLES AND PEPPERS	Adeline Shepherd	60¢
THAT TEASIN RAG	Joe Jordan	60¢
12TH STREET RAG	Euday Bowman	60¢
TICKLED TO DEATH	Charles Hunter	60¢

That's all for this issue. Jim Kinnear is compiling the information sent in on the questionnaires that were sent out a few months ago. We hope to present it to you next Newsletter. If you haven't got around to sending yours in, please do. If you have lost your copy and would like a new one, let us know. We will send one out by return mail.

Lots of exciting developments in the offing, but more about them next issue. The January issue of the "Negro Digest" contains a warm and interesting article about Luckey Roberts. If possible, we will include it in the next Newsletter.

John A. Fisher,
Chairman.